



## **International Institute for Clergy Formation**

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Pastors for a New Millennium:

A Toolbox for Parochial Management

In summer 2009 the [National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management](#) and [Seton Hall University's International Institute for Clergy Formation](#) launched an innovative management seminar for new pastors, entitled Pastors for a New Millennium: A Toolbox for Parochial Management (read more [here](#)). The goal of the program is to equip new pastors for the increasingly complex challenges they face in modern parishes, and this was done through a series of intensive and comprehensive workshops and classes taught by seasoned professionals. What follows are synopses of the classes.

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### **1. Pastoral Leadership**

Pastoral power is like a three-legged stool, according to Rev. Robert Stagg, a priest and pastor within the Archdiocese of Newark, NJ, since 1975. The first leg is power and authority from above; the second is power that pastors draw from below (from their congregations); and the third is power that emanates from within, sometimes known as ‘fire in the belly’. If you have all three legs of the stool, maintains Rev. Stagg, you’re well on your way to achieving effective pastoral leadership. Calling the job of pastor one of the toughest on earth, Rev. Stagg describes three responsibilities which, if properly executed, can help its practitioners emerge successful. One is to be a steadfast “keeper of the vision” with a clear-cut direction and definable end in sight for the parish. Another is to hire a topflight staff whose members have a strong work ethic, are willing to be part of a cohesive team, and share the pastor’s vision for the church. And the third is repeatedly assessing the needs of the parish by staying close to staff members, lay leaders and the congregation-at-large.

### **2. Religious Education within the Church’s Essential Mission of Evangelization**

A former Catholic high school teacher and president, Rev. Geno Sylva delves into the complex issue of faith formation and religious education and, more specifically, the linkage that exists between religious education and the Church’s essential mission of evangelization. Rev. Sylva encourages his colleagues to revisit the traditional pastoral approach to ministry by no longer confining it to just catechesis, but expanding it to foster faith formation, conversion and discipleship. Together, these avenues constitute a “roadmap for how we can bring young people to Christ within our parishes,” he says. To reach that ultimate goal, he emphasizes, religious education -- whether it’s on Sunday morning or part of youth ministry -- must touch the minds, the hearts and the moral values of young people. What’s more, parishes must commit to being “evangelizing parishes” and “Eucharistic parishes,” Rev. Sylva concludes.

### **3. The Pastor and the Diocese**

The diocese constitutes a mother lode of resources for parishes which they should not hesitate to tap into. That’s the overriding message of Msgr. Franklyn Casale, president of St. Thomas University in Florida, who calls upon his considerable Chancery experience. Among the key diocesan players whose expertise can be a tremendous asset to new pastors are the chief finance officer, the vicar general, the chancellor and the judicial vicar. As Msgr. Casale further explains, dioceses have the know-how to help pastors make wise decisions and avoid pitfalls in important areas like implementing staff changes, deciphering the parish financial statement, buying and selling property, preparing and submitting (as required by canon law) a budget, insurance, legal, risk management, banking and investments. In the area of banking, for example, Msgr. Casale notes that even if the parish has a relationship with a local bank, a pool arrangement with the diocese can often yield better returns on its money.



#### **4. Best Practices in Parish Internal Financial Controls**

Charles Zech, a professor of economics at Villanova University and director of the Center for the Study of Church Management there, draws on the findings of his 2005 national survey of diocesan CFOs, and a follow-up survey of parish finance councils, to provide valuable financial guidance to new pastors. While the Catholic Church is not a business, pastors have a stewardship responsibility to employ sound business management practices and tools, emphasizes Zech. Among those he cites are establishing comprehensive fraud policies; conducting annual internal audits supplemented by external audits at least every three years; public disclosure of the names and professions of every member of the parish finance council; transparent and accountable parish budget processes; and rotating counting teams for the Sunday collections. Through transparency and open lines of communication to the parish, pastors can ensure their ministry is known for its accomplishments, not for any financial improprieties, asserts Zech.

#### **5. Effective Risk Management**

In addition to tending to their religious ministries, pastors preside over millions of dollars of assets and deal regularly with a thicket of administrative issues that range from human resources, facilities management and fund-raising to insurance, investments and disaster planning. The common thread that enables pastors to navigate among them is risk management, according to Paul Rubacky, chief financial officer of the Paterson (NJ) Diocese. In this practical guide to risk management, Rubacky outlines the legal, contractual and financial implications associated with these issues so that pastors can make better, more informed decisions. In the area of insurance, for example, parishes too often fail to record incidents of people slipping and falling on church grounds. Because this can come back to haunt them later on if a lawsuit is brought, parishes are well advised to document every incident, big or small. The bottom line, says Rubacky, is that effective risk management can protect the financial integrity of the parish, and the reputation of the pastor.

#### **6. Building Councils**

Who are the best people to have on your parish and finance councils? Should they be appointed or elected? How long should they serve? What's the optimal number of council members? What role should subcommittees and task forces play? Dennis Corcoran, pastoral associate for Church of Christ the King in New Vernon, NJ, and a frequent national speaker on topics that include liturgy, stewardship and Church management, offers his sage advice to pastors on questions like these and others as he delves into the critical role of parish and finance councils in the Church today. Corcoran suggests, for example, that pastors avoid selecting as council members "a bunch of yes people who rubberstamp everything," but instead choose people with strong opinions who can respectfully disagree. As part of his helpful "rules of the road," Corcoran also recommends a number of resource materials that will enable new pastors to more effectively manage their councils.



## **7. Fundraising as Christian Stewardship**

Church leaders need to radically change the way they think about fundraising so that it's seen as an effective and profound ministry in itself, and not as a distraction or contradiction. So says Kerry Robinson, executive director of the [National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management](#) and one-time head of the Church's fundraising program at Yale University. Robinson describes the major obstacles that have traditionally stood in the way of effective fundraising within the Church, and how infusing the task with "a palpable sense of joy, purpose, and an incredible closeness to God" can help overcome these roadblocks. Drawing on her successful efforts at Yale, Robinson discusses the importance of the maxim "money follows mission," and how stewardship should be at the heart of every fundraising program. Just as importantly, she encourages pastors to be "bold and imaginative" when it comes to fundraising, and eager to break from tradition.

## **8. So Your New Parish Has a School!**

New pastors have an incredible opportunity to build a strong parish model with their schools as a pillar, according to Barbara Doyle, who has spent 37 years as a Catholic school teacher, principal and staff developer. She presents three "tools" to help pastors succeed in that job: communication, visibility and support (which she refers to as the "CVS" model). Communication means being a good listener and learning from others, which requires scheduling time with the principal, teachers, administrators and parents. Visibility means building a strong presence through activities like attending school events, teaching a religion class, and being active in the community. Support means not going over the head of the principal, but letting him or her do their job. Doyle reminds pastors that they, more than anyone else, will influence the success of the school, which is why they need to set a positive tone and a compelling example.

## **9. Pastoring and Administering a Mission-Driven Church**

As Rev. Jack Wall sees it, churches are not member-centered institutions (like clubs), but mission-driven institutions -- and that has profound implications for pastors. It means they must "pastor with excellence" as they find ways to make people part of the mission of the church. And how do they partner with excellence? Rev. Wall, who for 24 years was pastor of Chicago's historic Old St. Patrick's Church, outlines three helpful strategies. The first is naming a board of guarantors, comprised of lay people, to take responsibility for the future vision and mission of the church. Second is finding an administrative partner (perhaps a retiree) -- someone who loves the Catholic Church, has a strong management background, and can compensate for any management shortcomings of the pastor. And third is creating joint ventures with others to help realize the mission of the church. Not everything that occurs within the parish, emphasizes Rev. Wall, has to emanate from the pastor.



## **10. Standards for Excellence**

Because priests weren't ordained to grapple with many of the temporal issues they face today, they often find themselves sidetracked. But as Michael Brough with the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management explains, there are processes, policies, approaches and structures in place to help them stay on course. They are housed under the Leadership Roundtable's [\*Standards for Excellence: An Ethics and Accountability Code for Catholic Parishes, Dioceses and Nonprofits\*](#). The Standards are a collection of 55 performance benchmarks that offer a comprehensive blueprint for a well-managed and responsibly run Catholic parish. Brough explains how parishes can implement best practices incorporated in the Standards – best practices that already exist in the corporate, nonprofit and secular worlds, even within other parishes and dioceses. This implementation process will first require a “culture change,” says Brough, that looks to the leadership skills of the pastor.

## **11. Getting Started at Parish Management**

What things should a pastor do when he first takes over to secure his temporal house? Maria Mendoza, the business manager at St. Rose of Lima parish in East Hanover, NJ, offers her expert advice. Above all, don't be afraid to change established procedures if you're convinced that you're right, she insists, though the benefits of any change must be weighed carefully against the cost. In the field of human resources, Mendoza suggests sitting down with each staff member, as well as the heads of parish ministries, to determine if they're qualified to hold their positions. On the financial side, she urges incoming pastors to arrange for an external audit, and to sit down with an accountant or finance council member to review all the numbers and what they say about the fiscal strength – or weakness – of the parish. Other critical upfront duties should include a walk-through of the church's physical plant to determine the need for any repairs, and conducting a parish census if one hasn't been done in the past five years.

## **12. A Six-Month Game Plan**

A pastor's first six months is an exhilarating – and exhausting – period of his life. A thoughtful, six-month game plan can provide a smooth transition to long-term success, maintains Jim Lundholm-Eades, director of parish services and planning for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Among the top priorities he cites are building strategic relationships and focus on “sanctifying” by being seen as a person of prayer, someone who visits the sick and homebound and is serious about outreach. It's also important over the short-term, says Lundholm-Eades, for new pastors to set personal limits for themselves to avoid exhaustion or burnout, and to restrict their priorities for change within the parish to two or three areas (i.e., faith formation, quality of music at Mass). Other advice: make sure they receive sound financial information from knowledgeable people in the diocese and parish; don't try to supervise everything that goes on in the parish (instead giving others the freedom to do their jobs); and listen broadly but don't react hastily to what people tell you.

